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Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 568 – Health Care Practitioners – Telehealth – Out-of-State Health Care Practitioners
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
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The Rural Maryland Council **Supports** SB568. On March 5, 2020 a state of emergency and catastrophic health emergency was proclaimed as COVID-19 began to spread throughout the state. As Marylanders were advised to avoid contact with others as much as possible to stop the spread of the virus, certain telehealth capabilities were expanded. As telehealth became more in demand, so did the need for more telehealth providers. Currently, in Maryland, out of state healthcare workers are only allowed to practice in the state under limited conditions, few of which help the current shortage. SB568 would allow for out of state healthcare practitioners who are licensed, certified, or otherwise authorized by law to provide healthcare services in another state to provide telehealth services to a patient located in Maryland. These practitioners will only be able to do so after applying, following a certain process, and being approved by the appropriate health care operations board.

Rural Maryland is currently experiencing a shortage in healthcare providers, particularly in specialty areas, mental health and dental. In addition to having a lack of healthcare providers, Rural Marylanders tend to be both older and in worst health than their suburban counterparts. This puts many individuals of rural Maryland at a greater risk during the COVID -19 pandemic, making it less safe for them to leave their homes, especially to go to a high-risk location such as a medical facility.

Senate Bill 568 will allow for safer means of healthcare and provide easier access to healthcare for rural Marylanders who often lack access to these services in their area. According to the CDC, the amount of telehealth visits during the last two weeks of March 2020 rose 154% compared to the same time period from 2019. The increase may have been a result of the telehealth related policy changes made during that time. With an increase in telehealth patients there is also a need for more telehealth providers. SB568 will allow more telehealth services to be administered to Marylanders in a faster, more convenient, and safer manner.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully asks for your favorable support of SB568- Health Care Practitioners – Telehealth – Out-of-State Health Care Practitioners

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”